

European Union Grants Advisor France

Training and Recruitment Package Helps French IT Services Enterprise Offer Better Support to Small Businesses

France is eagerly embracing the knowledge economy. Economic growth rates are rising again and the French authorities have committed themselves to making small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) the dynamo behind a leaner, fitter, private and public sector.

In 2005, unemployment in France peaked at 10.1 per cent—even though overall economic productivity remained positive. For the past six months the jobless total has been falling as new growth and job creation strategies begin to work.

For France, as well as many other long-established European Union (EU) member countries, the remedies lie in the creation of new and more highly-skilled positions, the provision of valued-added goods and services, and the wider promotion of innovation and competitiveness. Local and regional governments (LRGs) are very much part of the solution, but the recovery is increasingly seen as being led by SMEs.

In light of this, the EU is pushing IT adoption and training in technology as it recognises that improved IT skills result in increased innovation, higher productivity and economic growth. In March 2000, the European Council created the Lisbon Agenda, which aims to make the EU 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. And where better to start than with the SME market? The European Council strongly believes that SMEs using IT and creating dynamic local economies will lead to consistent growth at the macro-economic level. But, the council needed an infrastructure

to help market the resources available, and support SMEs in securing the vital funds needed to get their staff trained.

As a result, the EU Grants Advisor (EUGA) initiative was born. EUGA is a programme developed by a consortium of organisations, including Microsoft, HP, and Intel. SMEs and LRGs are able to increase their awareness and understanding of EU funds, as well as take advantage of a facilitated application process should they wish to apply for funds for which they are eligible.

The success of EUGA depends heavily upon the participation of the members of the local consortium who actively support the programme in each country.

It helps companies to access training courses at massively discounted prices (up to 80 per cent). Such discounts go a long way to removing 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 local community. The money comes from a successful funding bid and is a direct result of support from the consortium of HP, Intel, and Microsoft France.

Céline Ucar, Consultant to the French EUGA Programme, says: "In France, we have different grants available to SMEs from our national government for innovation or international development, but lowering unemployment is a key objective. EUGA is aimed at raising IT skills within the workforce. The initiative is entirely in line with, and complementary to, the government's target of decreasing unemployment."



"AS A YOUNG COMPANY, TAX AND SOCIAL COSTS WERE HANDICAPPING OUR BUSINESS, IF WE TOOK ON UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE, BUT THE EUGA PROGRAMME HAS HELPED US TO GROW AND MEET THE NEED FOR OUR SERVICES."

Sylvain Fievét, General Manager, SOS PC Assistance



SOS PC Assistance is one such organisation to benefit from the EUGA programme. In 2003, two entrepreneurs, Sylvain Fievét and Sven Lung, founded SOS PC Assistance. This Paris-based business is striving to create a national network of qualified IT technicians devoted to helping SMEs with their technology needs. Already heralded by the French press as a dynamic new player in the world of IT, and with 300 IT technicians on its books, SOS PC Assistance wanted to make a unique contribution to the growth of the knowledge-based economy in France.

Typical customers for SOS PC Assistance include accountants, medical practices, and lawyers, some with as few as two PCs. They all share a common goal: that of providing professional expertise and letting someone else worry about the critical IT support for the business.

However, as a young company, the tax and social costs of taking on unemployed staff was handicapping the business. It required additional funding to support its short and medium term growth and so turned to the EUGA programme for help.

Nicolas Peix Lavallée, Business Development Manager, Microsoft France, says: "We've worked closely with SOS PC Assistance over the past two years. We wanted to create a new channel of partnership, where we could support a partner in helping more small businesses in France with their technology requirements."

EUGA helped SOS PC Assistance to improve its performance while at the same time helping unemployed people get a foot back on the career ladder. Through EUGA, the company received grant support for the recruitment of three previously out-of-work IT specialists, as well as a training package for a total value of €41,000 (U.S.\$49,600).

Contact:

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

As a result of the EUGA grant, SOS PC Assistance received a direct subsidy towards the crippling social and tax costs of taking on the unemployed persons, who were at different stages of their careers. Says Fievét: "Of the two employed in Paris, one was seeking to return to work after studying for a Master's degree and the other was entering employment for the first time."

The third new starter, who is employed in the company's Marseilles operation, had 15 years' experience, but needed to refresh his technical skills after a period of unemployment. The training package gave SOS PC Assistance its biggest benefit, because the trainee has now become a trainer for up to 60 existing staff, facilitating the re-skilling of key staff with knowledge about the latest technologies.

Fievét, General Manager, SOS PC Assistance, says: "The EUGA programme has helped us to grow and meet the need for our services. We're also improving our internal business processes with the new knowledge we're gaining of enterprise resource planning (ERP) technology. Put together, this is a win-win situation for us and is delivering on the EU vision expressed in the Lisbon agenda."

The promotional drive for EUGA is being supported by Intel, HP, and Microsoft France. 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. Says Peix Lavallée: "We are speaking to journalists in the press, on TV, and on radio about IT and trying to change attitudes. We've really worked hard on the EUGA project and we believe the right messages are getting through."

Fast Facts

URL:

www.microsoft.com/france/entrepreneur/subventions/home.aspx
www.sospcassistance.com

Country

France

Profile

SOS PC Assistance, founded in Paris in 2003 by Sylvain Fievét and Sven Lung, is seeking to create a national network of qualified IT technicians devoted to helping small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) with their technology needs.

Situation

SOS PC Assistance wanted to offer placements within its organisation to unemployed people with the skills to help grow the company. It also needed to improve the skills of its existing nationwide network of IT experts so that they can offer more services to customers.

Solution

SOS PC Assistance successfully applied to the European Union Grants Advisor (EUGA). EUGA is a programme developed by Microsoft France, in partnership with HP and Intel, through which SMEs and local and regional governments (LRGs) are able to increase their awareness of and understanding of EU funds, and take advantage of a facilitated application process should they wish to apply for funds for which they are eligible. Without the necessary and vital role the local consortium of partners play in the EUGA programme, such successes would not be possible.

Benefits

- Jobs for unemployed people and training for IT professionals already in work.
- Assistance for SMEs, which drives increased growth in local economies, establishing a solid foundation for future prosperity countrywide.
- Helps expand the grant beneficiary's IT support business throughout France.