

Partners Gain Effective Sales and Marketing Employees Using National Grant



The European Union Grants Advisor (EUGA) informed Microsoft® partners in the Funen and Southern Jutland regions of Denmark about a grant to fund the training of IT professionals. With EUGA's help, a group of 13 partners successfully applied for €209,677 (U.S.\$284,740) to participate in the Microsoft Small Business Sales Specialist programme.

Microsoft® professionals working in the Funen and Southern Jutland regions of Denmark uncovered a common need among small IT partners in the area. Their evaluations and focus groups revealed that, while partners were happy with their employees' technical knowledge, they felt there was a gap in sales and marketing competencies.

The Microsoft team presented these findings to AF Odense—a regional branch of the Danish unemployment office—and two education partners: West Funen Business Academy and Microsoft partner Living Skills. Working together, representatives from the four organisations devised a plan to offer unemployed people in the region the opportunity to train in sales and marketing.

The project team was encouraged by local partners' enthusiasm to train and employ groups underrepresented in the workplace, such as mature and female candidates. They decided to give graduates from the programme the opportunity to go straight to work for a participating Microsoft partner.

Sales and marketing professionals at Microsoft worked with training experts from the West Funen Business Academy and Living Skills on the specific course modules. They came up with the Microsoft Small Business Sales Specialist programme—consisting of 16 weeks of sales and marketing training followed by an eight-week internship at a Microsoft partner.

During the training, candidates complete the Microsoft Sales and Marketing Skills Assessment and work with examples of Microsoft marketing campaigns. Elin Ellefsen, CEO of Living Skills, says:

"The Microsoft blueprint for the training creates high expectations for both partners and candidates. We engaged in this project because we believe in the business value that the future sales and marketing employees will bring to these companies."

As the project gained momentum, the European Union Grants Advisor (EUGA) informed partners in the area of funding opportunities to support their participation. In addition, the grant would also subsidise the salaries of candidates. EUGA consultants helped 13 partners apply collectively to the Danish Public Employment Service for the grant. In December 2006, this group of partners was awarded €209,677 (U.S.\$284,740).

To help partners employ the best candidates, the West Funen Business Academy assessed the needs of each partner and tailored the training accordingly. Marlene Rasmussen, Vice Director, West Funen Business Academy, says: "By visiting all participating companies, we gained valuable insight into their respective needs. This really helped us match the right companies with the right people and should ensure a high employment success rate."

In October 2006, 13 candidates began the course. Now, 11 of them are working as sales and marketing professionals in the Southern Jutland and Funen regions. Anders Lidgaard, Chief Executive Officer of Microsoft Gold Certified Partner Pentacon, has successfully recruited from the programme. "As a small company, it can be difficult to attract the right people, but this project gives us access to a much larger pool of candidates," he says. "Without help from EUGA, it would have been difficult to get funding for our participation."

EUGA Fast Facts

Microsoft® believes that technology can play a key role in economic and social growth. It is working in partnership with technology companies, banks, consulting agencies, and other organisations to help more SMEs obtain government funding through its European Union Grants Advisor (EUGA) programme. Through this programme, SMEs and local and regional governments 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 that they are eligible for.

Lisbon Agenda – Fast Facts

In March 2000, the European Council (EC) set a goal for the European Union (EU) to prepare its transition to a knowledge-based economy and society. This initiative known as the Lisbon Agenda, promotes better policies for the information society, and research and development, and encourages structural reform for competitiveness and innovation. The EU recognises that a powerful way to achieve this is to fund IT awareness and training schemes, research and development, and support new business start-up

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