

Presentation

In this publication, we wish to acquaint enterprises, national institutions, international cooperation projects and other interested organizations with our experience in creating and starting up our Project's web site.

Today all companies, all organizations and *also* all development projects should have their own web sites. We are not talking here about the old web sites where an organization merely presented its institutional image without reporting on the activities it has carried out and planned and without allowing for interaction between the organization and its customers (customers in the broad sense of the word).

Today the Internet should serve as a working tool for both enterprises and organizations; it should facilitate access to the Project by persons or companies that are served by it. It should make their work more efficient and more effective. The Internet is also an excellent vehicle for bringing in persons from outside the organization to evaluate its work. Why not invite people to evaluate and criticize our activities –and publish the results in our web site for everyone to read?

Our basic idea in creating our web site was to use the Internet as a working tool to involve the user directly; to use our web site to make our Project transparent to the enterprises we work with; and finally to render accounts, what English-speakers call "accountability."

The following pages give an account of our experience in defining, designing and implementing our web site. We also tell about our failures and the lessons we have learned.

This text is included in the presentation of our web site through a CD-ROM.

Lima, April 2001

Heiko Windolph
European Co-Director

Juan Carlos Ríos
National Co-Director

Introduction

The European Union – Prompex Export Agreement (ALA/93/57 Project) is a part of the cooperation provided by the European Union to the Government of Peru and its purpose is to boost the competitiveness of small and medium Peruvian export firms and help them to increase their exports. By April 2001 we had given training to 230 small and medium export firms and five exporters' associations, which experienced a US\$ 19 million increase in their exports over a three-year period. These companies are responsible for 10% of the country's non-traditional exports. The Project organized the participation of beneficiaries in 30 international trade fairs and missions and commissioned the preparation of 20 market studies and business intelligence reports.

The Export Agreement created the Programmes Export Peru (technical assistance, export planning and trade promotion); Exporting Quality (implementation of ISO 9000 and HACCP); Support for Exporters' Associations; Technological Missions (Peruvian managers visit European enterprises and receive on-site training) and E-Commerce (Business-to-Business type e-commerce solutions).

Web Project

We are presenting our experience in designing and implementing our web site. This web site is part of its management system, which has been given ISO 9000 certification by SGS.

What is the point in writing about the designing of a web site – what is so special about a web site? Does a Project really need a web site? Well, perhaps a web site to show who they are and who their counterparts are. And it might also be worthwhile to place some brochures or reports in the web site. Maybe even the Project's organization chart with photos of its Co-directors.

It was not our intention for our web site to present a flattering image of our Project, declare our good intentions and offer the public some old documents and links to the World Bank, IDB, and so forth. Nor did we want to bore users with

long texts and statistics that we would be hard put to keep up to date at all times.

In short: What we wanted was to design a web site that would serve as a working tool both for ourselves and for business people. We wanted to make use of the Internet as a vehicle for making our Project's management more effective, efficient and transparent.

Process

First: failure

It was not easy for us to arrive at what you now see in the Internet or on the CD-ROM. We started off with the questions: What do we want to show in our web site? What obviously came to mind was an explanation of what the Project is doing with a description of our results, an explanation of our aims, and so forth. When we saw the finished web site, we realized that what we had done was to prepare a brochure, a catalogue of our Project –and we realized that the entrepreneurs we are working with would not take time out to navigate our web site to learn what the Project's objectives and results are.

What was our mistake? We had asked ourselves what **we** wanted, instead of asking what the needs and expectations of our "customers" or "users" –the businesses and entrepreneurs-- were. Once we understood this, we redesigned our web site from top to bottom. We removed the charts, figures and long texts to create a clean, well-structured space dedicated to a single aim: How we could maximize the usefulness of our web site for entrepreneurs. And how visitors to our web site with 2 or at the most three clicks of their mouse could find the information or form they were looking for.

Test phase

To guarantee that our web site would really serve the small or medium entrepreneur, who often has problems in moving around a web site, we first had it examined by some enterprises. We observed the users' first movements in our web site, without comment. Afterwards, we asked them: "What would you do to find out about one of our activities?" and we gave them tasks like "Try to register for our ISO 9000 Programme." At the end, we had them fill out questionnaires to evaluate how user-friendly our web site really was.

We took the methodology for our questionnaire from the articles published by Jakob Nielsen in the Internet (www.useit.com).

The results speak for themselves –the people who took part in the test confirmed that our web site was very easy to use and highly useful. Obviously, there were some shortcomings that we are fixing. The reports and questionnaires can be found in the Annexes.

We are of the opinion that no organization or business should develop its web site without consulting its users, its customers, its target group to see whether it truly helps to meet their needs and expectations. On beginning the design, it should get together with its customers or target group to find out exactly what they expect of that web site. Much time and money can be saved that way. The organization, before launching its web site, must necessarily conduct a real test to evaluate its degree of acceptance and to uncover the shortcomings or omissions that always exist.

Nonetheless, the first place where the initial tests can most easily be made is in the organization itself.

Principles

In discussing the failings of our first attempt and asking ourselves why a development Project should have a web site, we arrived at three principles, which are:

Working tool

This, the most important principle, is the very reason for the web site's existence. It must be useful: useful for the customer, for the users, for the target group and also for the organization itself. When we state that the Internet has the potential to make the management and production of the small and medium enterprise and of the value added chain far more efficient, the development organization should include itself in this assertion.

Transparency

Development projects are often islands within society; sometimes they are highly bureaucratic and very few people know what they are really doing. A web site can help to open a window or a door to society, to customers, so they can come in and see what we are doing; what activities we are carrying out; what results we have achieved. Transparency, for us, does not mean presenting the organization in an idealized light, but reporting the truth about our daily activities and the results we have achieved.

Accountability

We firmly believe that an organization's customers are not interested only in learning what we are doing. They have opinions of their own and they like to express them. No institution, non-profit organization or private enterprise likes their customers to give their opinion about the service they are receiving – because normally that opinion is critical. They believe that freely expressed opinions spoil an organization's image.

We don't share that view. We believe that if we give enterprises a vehicle for criticizing our activities, this will help us to improve our services. It is not by chance that the enterprises trained by the Project are paying up to 70% (in the case of ISO 9000 and 14000 implementation) of the costs.

Practical things

What are the practical elements in the web site that facilitate the Project management and the contacts between enterprises and the Project?

New activities

In our web site, we announce new activities in the different sectors, giving enough details so that enterprises can decide whether those activities will be useful to them. They can register for them on-line.

Downloading of forms

In the case of the Programmes (Export Quality; Export Peru; E-Commerce), businesses can download the necessary forms to obtain more information about the conditions for assistance and the respective costs. Furthermore, consultants who are interested in offering their services can also download the necessary forms for doing so from our web site.

Make suggestions

In order to guarantee that the Project will always be demand-oriented (and not mainly supply-oriented), we urge enterprises to make suggestions for new activities in our web site.

Give us your opinion

One of the most innovative aspects of our web site is the chance we give businesses to publicly express their opinions about our activities, suggest ways we can improve in the future, and give us a rating of between 1 (bad) and 5 (excellent). These opinions are being published in our web site (see Garments sector/Technical mission to Germany).

Eurostat statistics

To keep interested enterprises informed about future activities, events or market studies, we are offering them the opportunity to sign up to receive newsletters containing that information on a regular basis.

Eurostat statistics

The Project has signed up to receive commercial information from the European Community's statistical office, Eurostat, which it is using to prepare data that it publishes in its web site (see export and import of T-shirts in the European Union). We don't think this will be the main task of our web site, but up-to-date, well-presented and commented trade information can be very useful to companies. We think that it is more this kind of "monograph" (and not "data burial grounds") that attracts businesses.