

Practical Implementation: How to support SMEs in writing competitive proposals:

Lessons Learned / Pitfalls

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Helping SMEs write a good Proposal **Presentation Overview**

A. So Many Pitfalls:

- Content
- Writing and Presentation
- Management

B. How can you help them (without losing your mind)



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So many Pitfalls: Content **Content Pitfalls**

- Content is by far the area where SMEs need more help
- The **proposal template** is a great a guide ...but questions are usually misinterpreted (?)
- Especially for SMEs with **little or no experience** in proposal writing their answers differ from what is expected.



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So here are some common pitfalls in



So many Pitfalls: Content

A. Disruptive Innovation Vs Realism

- SMEi and FTI seek **disruptive** innovation
- This does not mean that the innovation should change the world forever
- SMEs usually **overestimate their innovation** either because they think it is so or they think they should write so.
- Innovations should be **ahead of the state-of-the art** but neither close nor far away

If you have a good innovation say realistically why and which field it seeks to disrupt



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So many Pitfalls: Content

B. Potential Market Vs Real Market

- No the whole planet is not a potential customer!
- SMEs believe that by **inflating the target market** they will gain points in Impact
- The market should be very carefully chosen and explored. The innovation should **directly apply** to this specific market
- **End-users** are not necessary customers



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Explain in detail why the specific market is the target market, how the innovation connects with it



So many Pitfalls: Content

C. Need Vs Nice to have

- Nice features do not constitute a market
- The programme seeks innovations which address real, documented, **compelling needs**
- If a product is nice to have, or is good for you, or has positive environmental impact does not mean it will find customers

Explain in detail why there is specific need in this market and why people will rush to buy the technology



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So many Pitfalls: Content

D. Innovation Vs Competition

- There is always a competitive solution!
- SMEs think they gain points by **deflating and misrepresenting competition**, or worse say they have none.
- Present competitive solutions thoroughly. Show **advantages and disadvantages** and directly compare them with the SMEs solutions



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Competitors should be presented in detail and honestly. If the innovation is really disruptive competition is not a problem



So many Pitfalls: Content

E. EU Dimension Vs EU Domination

- No you are not expected to conquer the European Market!
- SMEs think they gain points by showing how in very little time they will **be selling their product in every EU country**. This is especially amazing when they are a micro SME
- European Dimension means roughly that they address a market **need which is not country specific** and that therefore can be exploited in multiple countries



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SMEs should show a realistic plan of entering the market and eventually passing their countries



So many Pitfalls: Content

F. Workplan Vs Capacity

- No, you cannot do everything yourself!
- SMEs approach the workplan as a typical breakdown of activities disassociated from their capacity.
- A good workplan sets WPs, tasks, deliverables, milestones, and is **associated with the SME resources and capacity**
- Partnering is in most cases obligatory!



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SMEs should either demonstrate realistically the can complete a task or show what kind of outside help they need to find.



So many Pitfalls: Content

G. Company Vs Ghosts

- You cannot hide your company behind words!
- SMEs like to present themselves in an incredible way **without being specific** about who they are or what they do
- They **avoid things like number of employees**, specific skills and capacity, products and projects.
- Micro SMEs even present a full Organisational chart with many departments



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SMEs should present who they really are, their strengths and weaknesses. Honesty is the best policy



So many Pitfalls: Content

H. Other content pitfalls

- **IPR vs Patents: No they are not the same!**
There more things to IPR than thinking of getting a patent. Freedom to operate, industrial design, copyrights, trademarks, etc
- **Sex Vs Gender issues: No they are not the same!**
Sex issues refer to equality issues, Gender issues refer to the applicability of the innovation
- **Risks Vs Barriers : No they are not the same!**
Barriers are identified obstacles in entering the market. Risks are what things can go wrong in the endeavour. There are also project implementation risks which are addressed elsewhere



So many Pitfalls: Writing and Presentation

Writing and Presentation Pitfalls

- These refer mostly to style, language, formatting of text and general feel of the proposal
- The general rules of proposal writing still apply but with some extra caution



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So here are some common pitfalls in writing and presentation



So many Pitfalls: Writing and Presentation

A. Writing

Research proposal style

- Too technical or scientific language
- Too many equations
- Bibliographical approach
- Not enough emphasis on market.



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**Remember this is not a research project.
Evaluators are happy to accept your scientific
results**



So many Pitfalls: Writing and Presentation

A. Writing

Not enough Research proposal style

- Too vague and general language
- Too many generalisations
- No support references
- Not enough emphasis on market.



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Remember this is not a concept paper. Evaluators need to see specificity in what you write.



So many Pitfalls: Writing and Presentation

B. Presentation

- Smooth text flow
- Clear and readable text
- No weird fonts
- Graphics and Tables are necessary to get your point across
- Not enough emphasis on market.



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Remember Evaluators see lots of proposals every day they need to understand easily what the proposer is saying



So many Pitfalls: Management

Management: Common Syndromes

- The **Of course I can write a proposal Syndrome**
- The **Of course I can write a proposal in one week Syndrome** (especially known for Phase 1)
- The **Missing pieces Syndrome**
- The **Is there a Section 4 Syndrome**
- The **Easy Submission Syndrome**



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Helping the SMEs

How can you help them (without losing your mind)

- Meet with them promptly. Assess their situation and propose a realistic date for submission
- Let them know about all the above. Make them watch EASME's videos and evaluators' tips
- Get them familiar with the proposal template
- Get them familiar with the submission



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Helping the SMEs

How can you help them (without losing your mind)

- If you can review the proposal, agree on an exchange schedule
- Review a very early rough draft and then a final draft
- Create a form for pre-screening



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Helping the SMEs

IMPRINT ON THEM: REALISM

They should be Realistic about:

- Their innovation
- Their ambition
- The need for the innovation
- Their market
- Their capacity and abilities
- Their SME description
- Proposal preparation



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Thank you
for your attention

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