

## Report session ‘How to approach companies’

Projects Meeting Wednesday 31 May 2017 – Brussels

As this session touches upon marketing techniques the used format enabled the participants to put themselves in the shoes of a company. Business and Research have different cultures, targets, goals and ways of working, but they also have common interests. These common interests may not come from the same incentives, but that doesn't stand in the way to profit from the situation.

For example, both research and business can have the goal to be linked with each other. Research from the perspective that business is a source of funding and bringing research results into practice; and business to be associated with science and “making the world a better place to live”.

During the workshop the participants did some exercises to regard certain issues from a company's point of view. One of the participants represented a company, which was quite helpful for he could confirm that researchers need to adjust their approach when trying to get a company on board.

This participant also added some examples of the daily practise in a company.

In the introduction it was explained that the essentials of good marketing and communication come down to:

- Empathy (which is at its simplest, awareness of the feelings and emotions of other people. It is a key element of emotional intelligence, the link between self and others, because it is how we as individuals understand what others are experiencing *as if we were feeling it ourselves*).
- Common sense.
- Master the narrative of the person/target group you want to influence/convince.

The participants were asked to put themselves of a company's decision maker (CDM) and answered and discussed the following questions. Below a summary of the answers and remarks.

### 1. What characterises the CDM?

- Cost driven thinking.
- Numbers (profit).
- Increasing of sales.
- Strategic thinking.
- Knowledge of business.
- Board.
- Hierarchy (boss).
- Annual cycle.
- Budget.
- Busy schedule.
- Short term.
- Impatience.
- Seeking new opportunities in the market.
- The decision maker will always be aware of how much the budget is and how much he is allowed to spend.
- Think about what the company's strategic objectives are.
- What is the company's board?
- Is there a potential flexibility?
- Inform yourself about what time of the year the decisions are made.

### 2. What typifies the work environment of the CDM?

- Develop overall strategies for the company.
- The ideal picture would be:
  - Hierarchy
  - Flexibility
  - Smart approach
- Current customers are limiting change of companies
- Incremental and risk avoiding attitude.
- Stressed.
- Hectic.
- Time constraints.
- Strategic level.

### 3. What kind of attitude do CDMs have regarding participating in research?

- Often not interested (bottom line)
- Stops, slows down their daily business.
- What is their effect?
- Depends on the company culture.
- Obstacles are lack of time and committed resources.
- Self-interest (what's in it for me?). The why question of question 3 comes in here.
- Good to realise that international involvement in R&D can be a carrier boost (individually) or a corporate image boost (company).
- Do your homework on the corporate social responsibility. Is it genuine, are they really driven.
- Even if the company participates for “cosmetic” reasons, there is no harm in profiting from that. During the process the superficial involvement can change into sincere involvement.

### 4. What is important for CDMS in the process of deciding whether to participate?

- No extra costs/resources.
- Benefits versus costs.
- Reputation.
- What is the potential business case?
- What is the result and how is the company able to use it?
- What is expected of the company?

### 5. What would be a typical reaction of CDMs on a request for participation

- It is not invented here.
- Researchers sell reports, companies don't buy reports.
- Nobody is allowed to see internal data.
- Saving time, costs and resources of main operations should not be disrupted.
- Nice to know, what's in it for us?
- CDM will **always** ask:
  - What?
  - Why?
  - How?
  - When?
  - How much?
- Remember that:
  - “Very interesting.”
  - “I don't exactly know if this is useful for us.”
  - “I do not understand your language”.
  - Are polite ways to say NO.

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**6. Suppose the CDMs were allowed to demand a condition for the cooperation, what would that be?.**

- Formulation own needs, expected results/impacts.
- No costs for them.
- Industrial Property?
- Exploitation.
- Realistic low-hanging fruit.
- Understandable results.
- Learning opportunities.

It is clear that researchers and companies usually have a different view on the world. However, it is good to be aware of these differences and use it in your strategy to approach companies.