



BALANCE
green and stable

**GREEN POLICIES & FINANCIAL
SUSTAINABILITY
TRAINING PROGRAM
IO2 – A6
Module 6**

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Module 6

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Module 6 – External and internal communication methods

Description

This module is about external and internal communication methods specific to green practices. The unit on external communication focuses on how to make visible an internal initiative related to a green practice. It further explains how external communication can foster networking and finding opportunities that support green SMEs. The chapter also tackles internal communication, which is essential to maintain cohesion within a company.

Learning outcomes (for consultants)

- Cognitive: Gain a deep understanding of the importance of green initiatives in a competitive market; cultivate knowledge of various communication channels, both formal and informal and share this knowledge with SMEs.
- Affective: Be open to criticism; utilise feedback; respond to challenges; organize appropriate action.

Timeframe: 45'

Unit 1 – External communication

Introduction

Over the last decade, discussions **on good practices and sustainability initiatives** have become predominant in the business world, especially due to concerns over the alarming climate

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change (for the case of Ireland, see, for example, Cadogan, 2021). As a result, companies all over the world have become increasingly occupied with ways to **adopt** green practices, as well as with ways to **communicate** them to the public with the scope to turn them into a **competitive advantage** (Reilly & Larya, 2018, p.3). Subsequently, consultants that aim at researching and promoting **green agendas** -while simultaneously caring for their clients' **high quality of work and productivity**- need to make an extra effort on the communication front.



Image title: Consulting

Source: Pixabay.com

1. Promotion and visibility of a green initiative to customers and the general public.

In this rapidly changing world, green initiatives have become a matter of reputation and they significantly affect the image of a company and the “relationship-building between a company and its stakeholders” (Reilly & Larya, 2018, p.3). To that effect, consultants of SMEs implementing (or aiming at implementing) good practices and sustainability initiatives need to insist on the importance of investing in **external communication**.

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“[...] *external communication is about connecting with anyone outside of your business*”

(Fabrik, 2021)

External communication focuses on all external parties that interact directly or indirectly with the company. It aims at informing all interested parties of the company's vision, its culture, its priorities and the way it allocates resources conforming to a green agenda (Reilly & Larya, 2018, p.1). Subsequently, by means of sharing information, a company can:

- establish its leadership in the sustainability domain,
- differentiate itself from its competitors,
- and increase its appeal to various key stakeholders (e.g. staff, clients, suppliers, investors, etc.).

a) To advise per effective external communication, consultants must take under consideration:

- the **company's size**,
- the **communication channels** that it uses,
- the **content** that the company chooses to disseminate regarding social and environmental responsibility,
- and the **frequency** of communications.

b) Based on the company's position in the market, consultants need to examine all possible communication channels:

- **Formal outlets**, like annual reports or other types of documentation -letters, presentations, web pages, etc. (Jouany & Martic, 2020).

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- **Informal channels** like social media, or other informal information exchanges outside your organisation e.g. by your employees (these sort of channels cannot be directly regulated).
- Voluntary participation in **external rankings** (but this usually applies to large corporations, and, therefore, will not be analysed in this document)

(Reilly & Larya, 2018, p.11).

“Sustainability communication is a business strategy for companies who have integrated sustainability into their operational and strategic activities. It allows the company to tell customers, consumers, and other stakeholders on their business, operations, what you do and how you do your business using a sustainable approach” (Bhatia, 2021).

Consultants can convince SMEs to invest in formal communication by:

- a) Insisting on the fact that disclosing sustainability-related actions to the public enhances **transparency**,
- b) Wider publics create **consensus** for a green economy.

To achieve this, a company needs several (or all) of the following:

- *Marketing and branding* to connect with its audiences,
- *Live events/Presentations/Conferences* to increase publicity,
- *Networking strategies* to enhance extroversion and help a brand grow,
- *E-mail marketing and newsletters*,
- *Press releases*,
- *Social media* for immediate outreach,
- *A well-structured, operating website*,
- *Official (usually annual reports)*.

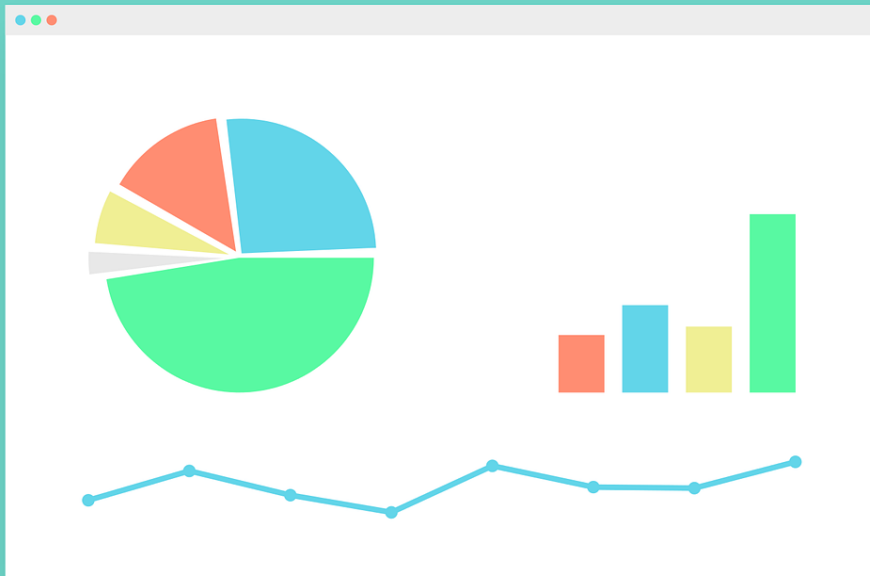
(Fabrik, 2020).

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Consultants can help SMEs **control** their upcoming **expenses** and favour one communication method over another -if need be, by using metrics.



Consultants can promote the planning and organisation of awareness **campaigns**, if necessary. In this way, larger audiences will be enticed to engage in the company's green agenda.



Consultants can showcase different communication tools and help their clients see how important it is to **deliver the right message to the right audience**.

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Informal external communication

Informal external communication can include **informal discussions** with various stakeholders, but it can also refer to **social media postings** that alert the public of upcoming responsible practices or that highlight the company's commitment to social responsibility in real time.



In any case, consultants can advise companies per communication processes, but cannot impose any model, as *“organisations will always understand and implement the consultants' recommendations in their own ways”* (Sutter & Kieser, 2015, p.4).

Challenges/Risks

Consultants must insist on the importance of communication strategies and marketing when advising their clients on the interconnection of a company's commitment to social/environmental responsibility and its image and reputation (Reilly & Larya, 2018). Without strategic planning, communication can cause more damage than the damage it had set out to control. Some of the challenges in communication are the following:

- a. Communication barriers between consultants and their clients.
- b. Communication barriers between departments of different functions (Sutter & Kieser, 2015, p.2).
- c. Failure to communicate the right message to the right audiences.
- d. Small impact/poor outreach when not knowing which channels to choose (traditional or digital).
- e. 'Greenwashing': the risk of appearing more sustainable in marketing and communication tools than what a company *really* is (Bhatia, 2021).
Greenwashing results in transparency and trust issues.

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Tips for consultants:

- a. Always keep in mind that “consultants and their clients follow different logics” (Sutter & Kieser, 2015, p.13).
- b. Always look for *mechanisms that generate **connectivity***, like *prototyping, goal definitions, “jointly agreed upon, detailed, and binding documents,” etc.* (Sutter & Kieser, 2015, p.14-22).
- c. Favour digital channels when possible: they have greater impact/outreach, and they can be measured.
- d. Advise clients to deliver honest and clear messages.
- e. Advise clients to keep their focus on their priorities.





Image title: Punctuation marks

Source: Pixabay.com

2. Networking and further opportunities supporting green SMEs

Communicating responsible business practices can benefit the environment and the local community; it can also offer great advantages to the organization itself. Consultants must

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explain to their clients the importance of networking in gaining allies, making a greater impact, and in enhancing a company's potential.



Networking can:

1. Keep key groups informed of respective planning and actions.
 - Responsible practices help companies acquire devoted staff that share the same vision. Networking for responsible practices can attract and retain customers, investors, suppliers, and many other groups of people belonging to the general public.
2. Help define the business's principles and values and earn the public's trust.
 - Networking expands the outreach of a company's ideas and priorities, thus cultivating productive dialogue between various stakeholders. As a result, valuable feedback can be processed and help in better defining a company's operational rationale and its effect on larger audiences.



To be successful, communications must deliver the right information to the right audiences with the scope to cultivate **networking channels** and include **key actors** in the company's efforts.

Clients must be constantly reminded of the fact that networking helps:

- *Broaden the information basis* on concerns, facts, arguments, and claims

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- *Involve increased amounts of societal values*
- *Create a common understanding of sustainability*
- *Build bridges across numerous stakeholder groups and engage new ones (e.g.investors)*
- *Find new business partners*
- *Increase resources/ secure financial support (e.g. grants)*
- *Determine concrete goals to be followed*
- *Gain valuable feedback*
- *Achieve coordination on multiple levels, involve many subsystems (e.g. political, scientific etc.)*
- *Develop a consensus about the implementation of sustainability strategies*
- *Gain legitimacy in sustainable development*

(Genç, 2017, pp.514-515).

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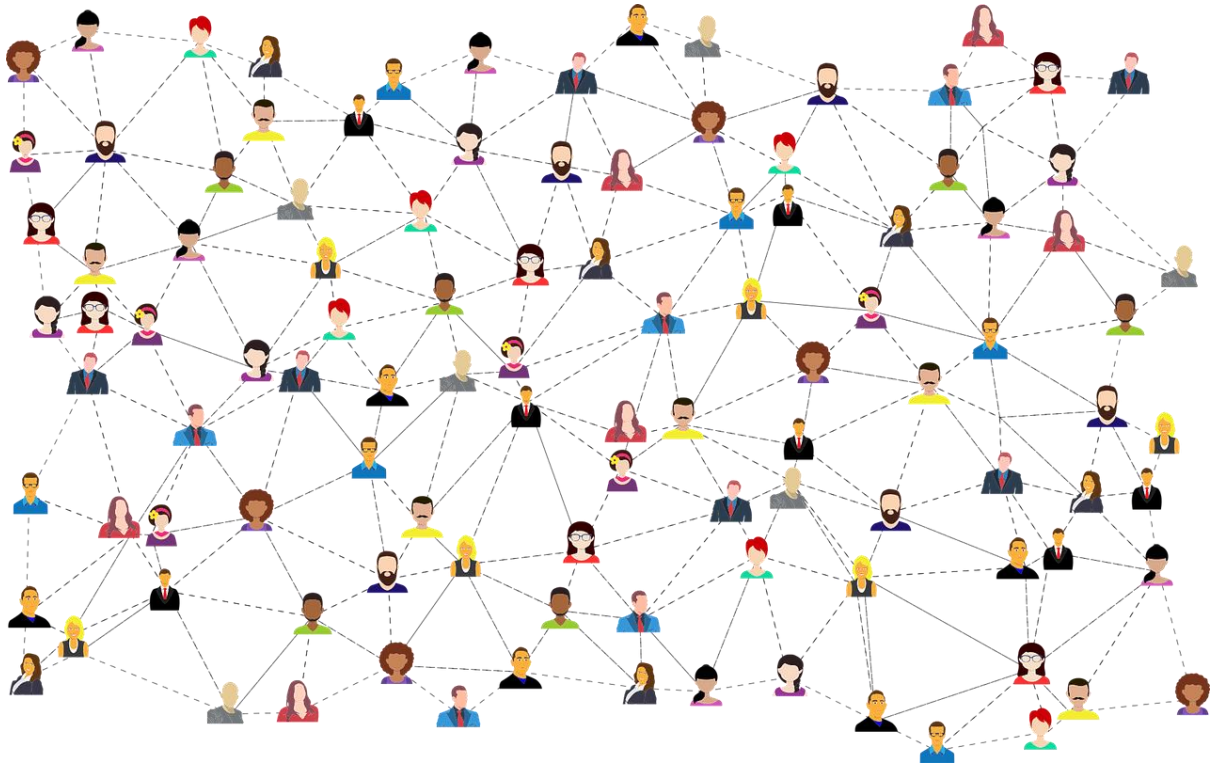


Image title: Network

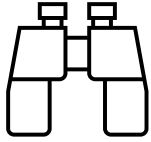
Source: Pixabay.com



Networking helps a company *build a strong community around its brand*, by ensuring **positive and long-term relationships with employees, customers, and other stakeholders like investors or suppliers** (Jouany & Martic, 2020). As a result, the overall experience of interacting with the particular brand is enhanced through transparency and trust.

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<https://www.forbes.com/sites/theyec/2018/09/04/creative-networking-tips-for-small-businesses/?sh=52a87c5e6b88> “Creative Networking Tips for Small Businesses”

Unit 2 – Internal communication

Introduction

Internal communication refers to *“all the strategies that transfer information between different members of your organisation”* (Fabrik, 2021). This kind of communication must be aligned with a company’s external communication strategy to ensure **cohesion** and a **strong brand image** through unified messaging (Jouany & Martic, 2020). Internal communication strategies are employed to keep employees informed of company policies and practices, as well as to incentivise them to engage in a common vision they also help lift the communication barriers between departments of different functions and increase connectivity within the organisation (Sutter & Kieser, 2015).

“When there is a lack of internal communication within an organization, it would be hard to implement the changes with respect to making the organization more sustainable” (Genç, 2017, pp.514).

1.Promoting green practices inside a company online and offline

Green practices can be communicated and promoted through **online** internal communication. This can include:

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- *Employee newsletters/personalised alerts* that can keep everybody updated about green initiatives
- *Social intranets* where employees can find valuable company information (e.g. Sharepoint)
- *Team collaboration tools* that improve communications between company employees (e.g. Microsoft Teams, Slack)

(Fabrik, 2020).

Offline communication inside a company entails the cultivation of face-to-face interpersonal exchanges. These ensure direct communication of messages, as well as a bonding atmosphere where feedback is encouraged and valued. In other words, offline communication speeds up information and opinion exchanges, thus creating a **positive workplace atmosphere** through socialising and bonding.

Another form of offline communication inside a company refers to printed material. This kind of material can attract attention and stay memorable. Therefore, it does not only help share information; it also helps retain said information.

Offline communication can also be effective through the organisation of speeches or events dedicated to green initiatives and the respective workplace culture. Such activities can improve transparency within an organisation, as well as increase individual engagement. Responsible business strategies can be communicated and promoted offline via learning opportunities and activities.



For example, a company can organise:

- Seminars with the scope to inform, proselytize and train its employees per green practices.

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- Brainstorming sessions with the scope to facilitate sustainability-related discussions and promote collaboration.



Informal communication favours the formation of Grapevines. Consultants must insist that their clients make real efforts for structured, accurate, and traceable information within their organisation.

<https://bbamantra.com/formal-informal-communication-channels/> “Formal and informal communication channels”



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcWtx8AAq1M> “What is Internal Communication? We asked 16 experts to spill the beans”



<https://staffbase.com/blog/internal-communication-examples/> “7 Meaningful Internal Communication Examples for 2022”

<https://staffbase.com/blog/modern-intranet/> “How to Create the Best Modern Intranet for 2022”

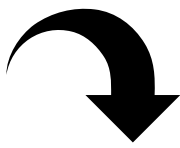
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2.Sensitising employees: finding a common vision

Research shows that discussing environmental issues can increase awareness and sensitisation over sustainability practices and motivate respective actions (Goldberg et al., 2019).

Communication in business is very important as it affects *meaning and expectations* within an organisation, thus linking its effectiveness to the company's productivity and overall performance (Genç, 2017, p.513).



To sensitise employees per responsible business practices and establish a common vision among all stakeholders, an organisation must:

- Invest in **educating** employees about sustainability issues so that they understand the goals behind the company's efforts.
- Keep them **informed** per the company's strategy and actions by keeping all communication platforms integrated.
- Implement **reward-and-recognition** programs.
- Solicit employee **feedback** on sustainability issues, especially when these are linked to job performance.
- Create a **sense of teamwork** and increase **positivity** in the workplace

(Jouany & Martic, 2020).

3. Alignment of internal and external communications

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An organisation must ensure that internal and external communications are aligned and that employees and customers receive the same information.

Alignment of internal and external communications ensures (among others):

- Strategic alignment among various stakeholders and strong teamwork sense
- A consistent and strong brand image
- A unified messaging system that prevents conflict and enhances trust and personal engagement
- High response rates against changes and unforeseen challenges or barriers
- The creation and sustainment of a strong community around the brand

(SMARP, 2021).

<https://blog.smarp.com/12-reasons-why-internal-external-communications-go-hand-in-hand>

“12 reasons why internal and external communications go hand-in-hand”

Effective communication strategies

Effective communication ensures greater impact and inspires people to share the same vision. This is especially important for green practices, as these require consensus to be legitimised and are interlinked with several societal values.

For communication to be effective -on any level, consultants must promote:

- the right tone and style to address the right audience,

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- the fact that ideas must be organised and not just floating around,
- clarity, precision, and logical utterances,
- empathy and respect toward all audiences,
- the importance of feedback.

Cost-effective communication

Some forms of communication cost nothing (e.g. face-to-face discussions), and others cost time and/or money that SMEs may hesitate to spend (e.g. digital marketing and communication plan). However, investing in communication has more value than the toll that one pays for it since it benefits an organization in the long run.

For instance, consultants can point out to their clients that:

- Training employees and establishing effective upskilling projects ensures that a company always has valuable staff that can respond to any new challenges.
- Investing in reward and recognition programs enhances positivity and incentivises employees to perform better.
- Keeping employees informed of every essential detail in the company helps them feel included and increases their level of engagement.
- Receiving feedback can lead to deeper insights into the company's operational mode and culture, and even generate new ideas.
- Maintaining effective communication channels increases the sense of teamwork, as well as productivity.

To sum up:

Effective communication is good *Return On Investment (ROI)*:

- It builds brand awareness

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- It brings new partners/clients/resources
- It increases the sense of teamwork and positivity
- It increases the quality of performance
- It increases productivity



In digital tools like, for example, social media applications you can use metrics to measure *ROI* in relation to key objectives, namely awareness and engagement, as seen in the table below (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010):



RELEVANT METRICS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA APPLICATIONS ORGANIZED BY KEY SOCIAL MEDIA OBJECTIVES

This table organizes the various social metrics for social media by classifying them according to social media applications and social media performance objectives. While it is not exhaustive, it should give marketers a useful starting point for measuring the effectiveness of social media efforts because all of the metrics listed are easily measured.

SOCIAL MEDIA APPLICATION	BRAND AWARENESS	BRAND ENGAGEMENT	WORD OF MOUTH
Blogs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •number of unique visits •number of return visits •number of times bookmarked •search ranking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •number of members •number of RSS feed subscribers •number of comments •amount of user-generated content •average length of time on site •number of responses to polls, contests, surveys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •number of references to blog in other media (online/offline) •number of reblogs •number of times badge displayed on other sites •number of "likes"
Microblogging (e.g., Twitter)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •number of tweets about the brand •valence of tweets +/- •number of followers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •number of followers •number of @replies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •number of retweets
Cocreation (e.g., NIKEiD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •number of visits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •number of creation attempts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •number of references to project in other media (online/offline)
Social Bookmarking (e.g., StumbleUpon)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •number of tags 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •number of followers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •number of additional taggers
Forums and Discussion Boards (e.g., Google Groups)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •number of page views •number of visits •valence of posted content +/- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •number of relevant topics/threads •number of individual replies •number of sign-ups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •incoming links •citations in other sites •tagging in social bookmarking •offline references to the forum or its members •in private communities: number of pieces of content (photos, discussions, videos); chatter pointing to the community outside of its gates •number of "likes"
Product Reviews (e.g., Amazon)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •number of reviews posted •valence of reviews •number and valence of other users' responses to reviews (+/-) •number of wish list adds •number of times product included in users' lists (i.e., Listmania! on Amazon.com) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •length of reviews •relevance of reviews •valence of other users' ratings of reviews (i.e., how many found particular review helpful) •number of wish list adds •overall number of reviewer rating scores entered •average reviewer rating score 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •number of reviews posted •valence of reviews •number and valence of other users' responses to reviews (+/-) •number of references to reviews in other sites •number of visits to review site page •number of times product included in users' lists (i.e., Listmania! on Amazon.com)
Social Networks (e.g., Bebo, Facebook, LinkedIn)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •number of members/fans •number of installs of applications •number of impressions •number of bookmarks •number of reviews/ratings and valence +/- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •number of comments •number of active users •number of "likes" on friends' feeds •number of user-generated items (photos, threads, replies) •usage metrics of applications/widgets •impressions-to-interactions ratio •rate of activity (how often members personalize profiles, bios, links, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •frequency of appearances in timeline of friends •number of posts on wall •number of reposts/shares •number of responses to friend referral invites
Video and Photosharing (e.g., Flickr, YouTube)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •number of views of video/photo •valence of video/photo ratings +/- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •number of replies •number of page views •number of comments •number of subscribers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •number of embeddings •number of incoming links •number of references in mock-ups or derived work •number of times republished in other social media and offline •number of "likes"

Source: Hoffman, D. L., & Fodor, M. (2010). Can You Measure the ROI of Your Social Media Marketing? *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 52(1), 41–49.

<https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/can-you-measure-the-roi-of-your-social-media-marketing/>

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ROI can also be measured in E-learning solutions, should your clients invest in employee training. The way to achieve this is by:

- *Setting clear goals for the online training solution*
- *Analyzing the course completion rates*
- *Studying analytics to gain deeper insights*
- *Evaluating cost against performance results*

[https://elearningindustry.com/ways-to-measure-roi-of-online-training.](https://elearningindustry.com/ways-to-measure-roi-of-online-training)

Conclusion

SMEs can utilise various tools and methods of communication to raise brand awareness in connection to their green initiatives and agenda. Consultants need to advise their clients that investing in effective communication is essential for their company's growth and sustainability. To that effect, consultants must insist that their clients strategically plan how the right message is delivered to the right audiences, and how internal and external communications are aligned: this is the main factor to create and sustain a strong and consistent brand with great outreach and appeal.

Case studies/Success stories

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InterTradelreland, Ireland.

<https://intertradeireland.com>

InterTradelreland helps SMEs increase their networks and grow their sales numbers while supporting innovation and offering funding and business insights. This company offers mentoring services and aims at improving its clients' skills, capabilities, and knowledge in a highly antagonistic market. Furthermore, **InterTradelreland** offers different support structures to ensure that innovative business ideas turn into profitable resources through proper communication channels.

McKinsey, Ireland.

<https://www.mckinsey.com/ie/overview>

McKinsey, Ireland, is part of the homonymous global management consulting company. **McKinsey** offers **multilevel** consulting services for the growth and development of both large and smaller companies. It also conducts research on climate change and respective risks. Furthermore, it researches and proposes viable solutions to reduce emissions, thus offering valuable transformation insights.

Business in the Community, Ireland.

<https://www.bitc.ie>

Business in the Community (BITC) helps large companies and SMEs develop Responsible Business Strategies. Apart from consulting services around realistic sustainable plans, workshops, extensive and up-to-date information on grants for Irish businesses, the company offers an array of resources and tools, e.g. for training and communication regarding social-environmental commitment and the respective initiatives.

- **Tico Mail Works**, Ireland

<https://www.ticomailworks.ie>

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Tico Mail Works offers customised mailing solutions. **BITC** has helped them with communicating their good practices through their sustainability report:

https://ticomailworks.ie/pdf/Sustainability_Report_2016.pdf

The report is a comprehensive guide about the company culture and values, as well as their operational model that thrives through a constant commitment to green practices and policies and to helping local communities.

Through the analysis of their vision and their organisation, the report ensures transparency regarding the company's initiatives and networking priorities.

SME2B – The Networking and Trade Platform for SMEs by European Entrepreneurs CEA-PME

<https://sme2b.european-entrepreneurs.org>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQW_pMD2fvo

SME2B is a free platform where SMEs can exchange information about services and products, search for business partners, utilise virtual meeting spaces, organise offline meetings, and foster new opportunities.

Dedicated to European small and medium-sized companies, this platform maximises the effect of the European Single Market by connecting people across the continent and creating new partnerships.

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2022, from <https://blog.smarp.com/12-reasons-why-internal-external-communications-go-hand-in-hand>

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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

