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### HOW TO BUILD YOUR TENANTS' VISIBILITY TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD

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### INTRODUCTION

A Science and Technology Park has three types of tenants: Universities, R&D institutions and innovative companies, besides other types of common tenants like services companies, leisure activities providers, and in some Park models schools and possibly householders.

Universities and R&D institutions are in general pre-existent organisations that in some way are linked to the very leadership of the Park. In some cases they are the leaders themselves, in other cases they are associated to local, regional or central authorities in a project aimed at the economic development.

For Universities and R&D institutions therefore, being associated or installed in the Park gives them increased visibility. It is not necessary for the Park to do much about it, besides referring publicly and frequently those organisations that confer to the Park its own credibility in what concerns innovation potential. This is naturally done in all

cases, because it is obviously interesting for the Park itself.

Anyway a Science and Technology Park aims first of all at bringing innovative companies to dare use knowledge in order to increase their competitiveness in a global market. This innovation capability is in fact the main source of the economic and regional development that is being pursued.

In general these are young companies, which have all the way to travel from home to the market. Besides all the basics of organising the work, mastering the technology, producing, funding the new company, the entrepreneur has to understand the market and to make the company known to the outside world and trusted by the market.

Park management would traditionally be happy to have provided the means that enabled the company to find its way. But much more can be done by a proactive management team that really cares about the tenants.

## SELECTION OF COMPANIES

When a company decides to become a Science and Technology Park tenant, it is looking for comparative advantages. Immersion into a high technology environment is in itself a big advantage under several points of view. It permits access to cross fertilisation with other companies and/or R&D institutions, it permits formation of consortia with other organisations to respond to market demands, and it increases credibility for the very reason of being part of that high technology environment.

On the Park's side it is crucial that applications are carefully screened through a highly qualified body, called a Scientific and Technologic Committee or similarly. Selection should take into consideration the type of activity and the degree of innovative thinking, as well as the qualifications and experience of the main promoters.

If the selection criteria together with examples of accepted and rejected companies are brought even informally to public knowledge, the very fact of having been selected becomes a valuable asset in terms of prestige and trustiness.

Under these circumstances, all positive actions aimed at publicly showing a company as Park tenant will not only increase its visibility but also its credibility.

That is why tenants welcome all Park initiatives aimed at increasing their visibility. That is also why a proactive Park management should do everything possible to keep permanent contact with the outside world.

There are no limits to the imagination about what the Park can do. Networking is the key word. But having said that, it only means that companies succeed in finding working and informal links with other companies and organisations and with individuals in such a way that they feel it helps them be successful in business.

## ELECTRONIC MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

The first thing that comes to mind nowadays is to use electronic means to bring to the public news about Park tenants. Common practice is to include in the Park's web page a list of companies together with some details describing what they are about.

Better than that is to include in the web page links to the companies' pages, where anyone can find not only what the Park knows about them but what each company itself is interested in transmitting.

We therefore suggest to make available a database referring companies, products, services and activities installed in the Park. Updating should be left to each tenant, so that information is always reliable and relevant.

The lists included in the Park's web page must be automatically updated through this information supplied by the tenants at their own rhythm. The target is to have an entrance door to the Park always available on-line and permanently updated.

The Park management team should of course have always present the need to check if information has been recently updated and call the tenants attention to the need to perform frequent updating operations. In some cases it may help if the Park management is available to supply technical services at tenants request and under tenants responsibility and costs.

## OTHER MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

But the Internet is not, or not yet, the only means of communication. Both internally to promote partnerships and externally to promote public notoriety, classical means of communication are still important.

So, publishing news about the companies in the Park's newsletter is still a positive action to bring that knowledge to the general public at a time where they are not looking

for the information - it just happens to come to the person.

Publishing a catalogue with reference to all Park tenants may help. This may come as a classical book or take the form of electronic information, although transportable - diskette or CD.

Radio or television campaigning or any other advertising in newspapers will serve as publicity for the Park but, if well planned and programmed, will also serve the tenants individually considered.

Any video showing the Park should always include some details about the tenants or at least about some selected tenants. This selection can even be one of the ways to privilege those companies that fit the best to the ideal Park standard.

Press releases are usual whenever something especially meaningful for the Park happens. Well, we only need to consider that new developments, new investments, new achievements of the tenants are important for the Park and use them in our press releases. This will help both the Park and the tenants and will strengthen the links between tenants and Park.

Visits to the Park are always an opportunity for the Park management to bring VIP's to contact some selected companies and let them promote themselves their own way. Besides the direct effect on those to whom the contact was addressed, an additional advantage for tenants is that VIP visits are often news in the press and are therefore a means for a company to become news without real effort.

#### **INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL NETWORKING GROUPS**

Additionally one can transmit to the outside world the idea that the set of companies in the Park are able to work as complementary units, joining efforts to solve any sort of problem that can be put to them. The Park management itself can operate as a gateway to

channel information to the right place in each case. This way the Park as a whole will be seen from the outside as a Centre of Competencies able to be consulted as a supplier of integrated technical solutions.

The Centre acts as an interface to promote commercialisation of the tenants technology and technological services. The scheme helps the access to skills and know-how based in the Park and increases the visibility of tenants. It helps their development and at the same time transmits a very positive image of the Park itself. It must be pointed out that among other things the Centre of Competencies is a way of permitting the tenants to use the Park's trademark in their own trading activity.

An interesting approach consists in building up a human interface to promote visibility and give life to the Centre of Competencies. In practical terms this means keeping active at all times a specialised technical team that selects tenants and therefore knows them all well.

This team will be available to receive requests from the outside world by telephone, fax, e-mail or personal contact, asking for concrete services or information; the team must be able in all cases to select the most adequate tenant or tenants to whom direct the request and the contact.

The Centre of Competencies will therefore represent an internal networking action - not a mere network that you once create and let go, but a consistent action that keeps pace with business needs of the whole community.

Participation in selected European R&D projects can also be an important means to increase Park and tenants visibility. Our Park is partner in a project aiming at developing new and innovative tools to help entrepreneurs using services and expertise based in Science and Technology Parks. This will necessarily lead to a higher degree of

contact between tenants and the outside world, again linking company name and Park name.

This kind of project will wishfully lead to durable links between different entities around Europe, i.e. it can be the cradle of future international business networks operating in the global market.

There are many opportunities to build this kind of networks through a careful use of European initiatives or through the submission to Brussels of new innovative ideas that are always welcome and supported.

But the European Union is not the only right environment to operate. In many cases a purely national network may be great for the business needs of our tenants. After all a large part of their market is internal market. In some cases the internal market is the right anchor and pusher to the global market. It all depends on each business case and on each business strategy.

So all attention has to be given to national government agencies, to national business associations, to regional development agencies, to local authorities, because all of them can become the right partner if we detect the opportunity at the right moment.

### **ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

Access to information is also to be considered. This may mean making available a technical library, including management, economy and law information. It may also mean giving access to the regular publication of new laws and regulations, which come about everyday, both inside the country and in European Union. Better still it may mean supplying as early as possible information concerning business opportunities that can arise either in the country, in European Union, or outside.

Of course these actions are only useful if the technical team does some critical selection in order to avoid flooding the companies with

too much information. And critical selection can only be performed if the technical team knows their companies with sufficient detail. Furthermore the technical team can assume a more proactive behaviour and look actively for business opportunities even outside the publicly available information.

### **EQUITY**

Maybe the most sophisticated means to increase tenants visibility will be taking part of the company equity and let it be publicly known. If this is done only to a very small group of highly selected companies and if the general business community recognises that selection is really careful and meaningful, it becomes a very valuable asset for the selected companies.

Not only visibility is highly increased but also the obligations from the Park to the company are strengthened. In a way this may lead the Park's management company to a practice of some sort of institutional business angel activity.

On top of that these equity links bring to the Park management a much higher sensitivity to business reality, to national and international business and economic environment, because they become vital to survival. And this is good for the Park management credibility as seen by business managers.

### **A REAL EXAMPLE**

To finish, it may be interesting to refer as an example what happened in our Park to the surprise of the management itself. As a tool associated to the recently launched Centre of Competencies, a database containing companies, products, brands, services and activities was installed, being accessible via the Park's web page.

During the launching campaign in June 2000 this tool registered 14,000 hits per month.

That was obviously an exceptional peak, but the total number in one year amounted to 100,000 hits and still now the level of visits is kept around 8,000 hits per month. For 100 companies this corresponds to some 80 hits per company per month.

We believe that the main success factors were the Internet, easy access via the first page of the Park's web site, updating by the companies themselves.

### **JUST TO ROUND IT UP**

What has been said is not new for Park managers. The only target of these words is to motivate some sort of brainstorming about

the best ways to act. One conclusion however we can take at once - it is better to do things than to be idle. Working for tenants visibility and networking means also promoting the Park's attractiveness.

Of course action costs money, but attractiveness generates income and income compensates costs. Some Parks are managed as private companies. Even if that is not the case, we consider that self sustainability is important to assure the future regardless of state policies. If we insist in this idea, then the question is to stabilise on a higher or on a lower platform, and we bet it is safer to be in a higher position.

