

# **SUSTAINING MARKETING INNOVATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE: HOW SMALL BUSINESS ENTREPRENEURS MUST LEARN TO LEARN DIFFERENTLY**

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# PRESENTATION & STUDY

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- Small business sector is characterised by poor levels of technology adoption which impacts negatively on competitiveness (European Commission, OECD, Federation of Small Businesses in the UK);
- There is evidence that ‘traditional’ digital marketing training courses have limited impact and engagement;
- Increasing complexity of small business digital marketing ecosystem – increasing opportunities but also challenges;
- A 30-month EU-funded transnational study aiming to benchmark current small business adoption and design interventions aimed at impact and innovation;
- Key findings to be presented at GRSME 2019.

# COMPLEX DIGITAL MARKETING ECOSYSTEM

Where, what and how do small businesses prioritise?



# A GROWING TO-DO LIST

But still the usual constraints on time and budget



# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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*Central research question:*

- “How can SMEs innovate through more effective learning in this environment?”

*Sub-questions:*

- How can SME owners and their staff sustain ‘lifelong learning’ in digital marketing?
- What infrastructure, both at individual SME and wider regional level, is required to support innovative, exploratory learning?
- What are the challenges and opportunities in implementing learning solutions for SMEs?
- What topics would learning programmes contain and how could they be effectively delivered to SMEs?
- How can SMEs become better data-driven learning organisations?
- What role can virtual learning play in transforming the digital marketing of smaller firms?
- This is a particularly pertinent question, given the mixed success of ‘traditional’ courses and workshops aimed at smaller businesses.

# THE PROJECT

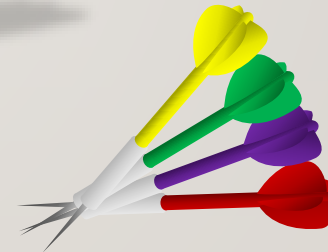
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- EU ERASMUS+ project September 2017 – March 2020
- UK, Denmark and Portugal
- University and Destination Marketing Organisation partners e.g. National Tourism Office for Portugal
- Initial survey to be sent out in Autumn 2018 aiming for 600 SME responses
- Aim of survey is to measure each SME on a range of criteria including current and planned investment in digital marketing, attitudes to innovation, change, role of digital marketing and, learning
- Each SME will be benchmarked against the overall cohort
- In the next action research phase (Jan-June 2019) 'learning networks' will be created and studied for impact and ability to improve SME digital marketing

# END GOAL – DEVELOP INNOVATIVE LEARNING SOLUTIONS FOR SME DIGITAL MARKETING



Learning solutions will be tried and tested among DMO small business partners in UK, Portugal and Denmark



# EXPLORATORY AND EXPLOITATIVE LEARNING

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- A key next phase in the study is to review the literature on types of learning and specifically the blend of exploratory and exploitative learning in a digital marketing context.
- There is evidence that smaller businesses are adopting a me-too attitude to digital marketing adhering more to exploitative learning and thereby missing opportunities associated with a more exploratory and innovative approach.
- Opportunities exist in areas including data-driven insights, new value propositions and co-creation with customers and other small firms.
- Implications exist for how regional bodies support small firms in their adoption of digital marketing



THANK  
YOU

