

Ask what you can do

Interview with Dr. Jay Bal,
Project Leader at West Midlands Collaborative
Commerce Marketplace

By Bjørn Borg Kjølseth
eMarket Services, Norway

www.eMarketServices.com



"It is necessary to re-think how your company can expand its business. And that can best be done by not focusing on what you are doing, but on your capabilities," says Dr. Jay Bal, Senior Fellow at Warwick Manufacturing Group and Project Leader at West Midlands Collaborative Commerce Marketplace.

The University of Warwick has for several years helped develop local companies, and with the help of European Regional Development Funds and local funding, it has built the "West Midlands Collaborative Commerce Marketplace" (WMCCM), www.wmccm.co.uk.

West Midlands is a region in England that traditionally was based on labor intensive industries and manufacturers, like coal mining and automotive. With globalisation and growing competition from other regions, West Midland had to change their focus. It was necessary to take a different approach to help local companies develop and expand.

"The role of government has traditionally been to build the infrastructure, like ports, roads and harbors, and this task must be expanded to new areas that can link regions and business," says Jay Bal. It is not enough to have a "road", it must have a junction that makes it possible to connect directly to the flow. Jay Bal is not just talking about the flow of product, but also to the flow of information.

The WMCCM portal is doing just that. It is teaching the companies to think differently and thereby finding new business opportunities based on their existing skills and collaboration. That is a new ground for the traditional thinking engineering companies that are more up to keeping their own skills protected and not wanting to show the competition what they are doing.

The WMCCM portal is open for any company, but local companies are supported directly and given the possibility of adding their detailed profile to the e-marketplace. And then begins the unique advantages of WMCCM:

WMCCM gathers the public tenders, but do not just publish them. Instead the tenders are evaluated for requirements like quality, experience and location. A company that wants to answer a tender can indicate what parts of the tender it can fulfill and the portal will then search in the company profiles to find potential partners that complete the requirements into a joint team.

The main advantage is that WMCCM does not focus only on companies that today deliver a specific product or service, but on the skills they have that makes them able to develop new solutions. One such example was a local company that was bending steel rods for the automotive industry. It would be easy to think that they should look for new business within that industry, but instead our system helped them identify their skill: bending steel; and that introduced them to a totally new industry: body piercing. Today, there are not only one of the leading manufacturers internationally, they have also increased their profit margins from the traditional 5-10% to 100%.

And WMCCM has been successful. "Even though we are not able to track all the results, we know that our portal has created more than 170 new jobs in West Midlands and saved at least 60. In addition it generated more than 7 million € in new sales last year," says Jay Bal.