

Content business goes international

Thinking is about to become big business again. Finland can get a head start by setting up best practice initiatives for innovation across the government, industry and education. In many recent future strategies we have been emphasized to attract inward investments to Finland. And we also need to create the type of environment that will continue to attract inward investment to Finland.

Knowledge and creativity are the key words of content production. An effective and seamless collaboration between industry, education and the creative sector will be required in order to ensure that the right facilities are available in which best practices and an innovative culture can be nurtured. Above all, it will need policy direction and financial intervention from the government. We have to realize that creativity therefore becomes the key business differentiator on the basis that it adds value to competence.

Innovation thrives in a culture that is not afraid of risk-taking, promotes the value of experimenting and rewards enterprise. Here in Finland we have created the right culture to support us in our efforts to become better innovators, but we also have to remember to nurture it.

In doing so, we must not only learn to understand the types of business that are shaping the knowledge economy, but also what it is that will encourage such companies to do business and prosper here.

In the Content Business Cluster report made by the Centre of Expertise for Digital Media, Content Production and Learning Services and on the www.contentbusiness.fi 50% of the companies say they have international operations. Anyhow, the point is that it is not export in a traditional sense, but in networked economy we are talking more about co-productions, international partners and finding contractors.

On average these companies are small, so it is very difficult for them to manage alone with internationalisation efforts. We could help companies by creating so called 'production channels' abroad. That would mean setting up an office in the target country staffed by one person or maybe more. It would be their job to follow goings-on and events connected with the content sector, identify suitable export opportunities for Finnish companies and pass information about them back to Finland. It is essential that the people working there are familiar with the business and specialised in it, so that they are able to recognise the real possibilities. At this moment, the prime target for the export channel is Los Angeles, but there are others as well. As a Mecca for games and other entertainment production, Los Angeles is a natural target. Finnish know-how in mobile technology could also find a market there. We would need to help companies to enter North American markets by helping with partner search and strategic marketing, doing market

analysis and helping with venture capital. Finnish companies tend to have some pitfalls in marketing.

Apart from helping Finnish companies to internationalise, 'production channel' could also act as an avenue through which foreign researchers and experts could come to Finland. So the production channel would work in two directions.

The Centre of Expertise for Digital Media, Content Production and Learning Services has many ways to support Finnish content companies to internationalise.

- Even though we often feel we are operating on the other side of the world far away from everybody, Finnish competence has attracted attention elsewhere. For instance the New Zealand Media Design School in Auckland offers education and researches the industry on a global level. Feasibility studies on digital content production are being carried out currently and one of the focus areas of the research is Finland. This contact has made it possible for the Centre of Expertise to investigate the kind of Finnish expertise that is on demand in New Zealand. In relation to this, we are organising a benchmarking trip to New Zealand in November 2005. The main destination is the Wellington area, with the largest and most significant digital content production company cluster in New Zealand. Weta Studios, which will be one of the locations to visit, is situated there. The reputation of Weta Studios as the expert of 3D effects derives from the masterful animations of the movie 'Lord of the Rings'.

- In addition to these benchmarking visits the Centre of Expertise supports the attendance of individual companies in e.g. international fairs. The ability of a small company to visit the important industry-related events may depend on a budget of just few hundred euros. It is possible to acquire sponsoring to cover part of the costs of fair and seminar trips through the Muusa2 venture that will be closed down at the end of the year. The amount of sponsoring can cover up to 40% of the expenses.

- One of the aims is to bring companies within the industry in the spotlight as often as possible. The Centre of Expertise will also contribute to the ICT for All exhibition arranged in relation to the UN World Summit on the Information Society – WSIS. The Centre will produce a DVD illustrating Finnish content business competence for the Finnish pavilion organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The DVD will present the products and services of companies listed in the www.contentbusiness.fi and www.learninbusiness.fi web sites within the Finnish Digibusiness portal. The web sites in question are an excellent forum for portraying Finnish competence to

foreigners. The sites are frequently used by the representatives of different countries and Finnish commercial secretariats all around the world.

- The Centre of Expertise is also preparing co-operation together with the MindTrek Association with Beijing Multimedia Industry Association. We were asked to promote 2005 China Multimedia Industry International Conference and Exhibition. Chinese markets are very tempting for Finnish digital content production because of the potential for growth. At the moment we are organizing exhibition booths for Finnish companies to attend the fair. The exhibition and the conference is in December, just before Christmas.

- At the moment we are seeking opportunities for Finnish content companies in London area: we have meetings with investors in the area and we are discussing about possibilities for Finnish companies to seek Venture Capital from there. We are also organizing a partnering event in MindTrek in November (Mind Market) for Finnish innovative SME's to meet English and Dutch companies to seek partners and vice versa. The event will offer company presentations and one-to-one meetings. It is going to be a unique chance to mix and find international partnership and export opportunities.

It is clear that every business has its creative hotspots and that these occur at many stages of the value chain. It is just a matter of identifying them.

By adopting an innovative philosophy in our business and applying a creative strategy across the enterprise, embedding it in the business mix, we will be in a much better position to map our business successfully onto the turbulent but wonderfully challenging environment in which we all find ourselves.

PROFILE, IRINA BLOMQUIST

Irina has her roots in the creative sector with her first BA in Textile Design from Häme Polytechnic, Wetterhoff Institute of Crafts and Design in 1993 and subsequent experience in the textile industry. Anticipating the emergence of digital media, Irina followed this up with a BA in Visual and Media Arts (Media Production) at Tampere Polytechnic, School of Art and Media. Moving to Ireland in 2000 to gain international experience she worked at Arthouse Multimedia Centre for the Arts in Dublin and earned an MA in Interactive Media from the Dublin Institute of Technology in 2001. She focused on usability and did her thesis on best practice in usability of airline online booking engines. In the same year she became interested in the Women In Technology (WIT) movement and spoke on this subject at the Sedona conference on emerging technologies which was held in Barcelona. In 2002 and 2003 Irina continued to participate in

industry events. She also contributed to the activities of KOH Associates, a specialist digital media consultancy where she was instrumental in bringing forward a number of innovative business concepts including EC/DC, the European Centre for Digital Competitiveness. In summer 2003 she brought this experience back to her native country and joined her present employer Culminatum Ltd where she holds the position of Program Director in the Centre of Expertise for Digital Media, Content Production and Learning Services. Since 2005 she has also acted as a Vice President for the MindTrek association.