

European *Virtual Incubator*

for Training and Support High-Tech SMEs

High-tech business incubators and parks became one of the most successful and attractive ways to support the high-tech and innovative SMEs. However these facilities have the capacity to support only a small, limited share of candidates. Most of the valuable start-ups from the target group which need support could not be real tenants in the existing incubators. IDEC SA participates in the **“European *Virtual Incubator for Training and Support High-Tech SMEs*”** project that aim to resolve this problem by setting up a virtual facility in Internet and an e-Learning methodology following the EC findings and initiatives.

The project aims to create better opportunities for easy and low cost access to continued professional training and advisory services for a specific target group including students, graduates, inventors, women and disables, predominately youth with knowledge of new technologies. These people have predisposition and skills to start-up and develop high-tech small businesses and they are advanced in using the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). **The approach stipulated is to set up an international web portal called EUROPEAN VIRTUAL INCUBATOR (EVI).**

EVI will expose the users to innovative training process and will allow for the implementation of a new type of relationship between SMEs, trainers and trainees. It can serve also the training departments of business incubators, high-tech parks, SMEs agencies, and development agencies in their attempt to support and continuously train the entrepreneurs. Sustainability of the project will be achieved through its commercialisation under the long-term partnership contract between partners.

The **aims** of the project are:

- To develop a new specialised training system based on knowledge and good-practices in the management of high-tech business and to disseminate it across the Europe through a multinational training network, seminars and learning materials.
- To develop, test and apply on-line training methodology for standard and personalised (self-training and tailor-made) courses based on a case studies database, identified needs, knowledge and experience of the partners, and constantly maintained feed back from the beneficiaries.
- To create an easy-to-learn virtual environment for continued professional development of entrepreneurs and managers of innovative and high-tech SMEs. It will be realised through setting up an e-Learning site called European Virtual Incubator (EVI) and providing a set of on-line services - group standard or tailored-made open classrooms, on-line self-training sessions, group discussions, multimedia supported sessions, conference and chat sessions, frequently asked questions (FAQ), publications and bibliography database.

The trainees will be able to use these modules and features after entering EVI's web portal and registering. The system will provide them with easy and flexible access to standard or tailored-made courses and will create a unique learning environment via EVI's Group Discussion Desk and Virtual Journal, which will enable international communication, knowledge dissemination and sharing of experience and information.

The following **target groups** will benefit from the project:

1. **Students and graduates** with good technical skills and scientific results from their research work are the main target group. Often they need to commercialise scientific results and inventions by setting-up of new companies. In such cases they have to obtain basic knowledge for establishment and development of own enterprises and to be trained in skills how to manage the growth of technology-based small business.

2. **Inventors, science workers from R&D institutes and young entrepreneurs working in high-technology business** with skills to develop new technologies and will to apply research activities' results.
3. **Women** staying at home because of maternity could engage their free time and make a better use of this specific period of every woman's life. Through the means of Internet and on-line learning they will keep in touch with business reality, increase their skills and develop themselves professionally.
4. **Disabled people** for whom the project will create unique opportunity to learn without physically attending seminars and courses.

The project will also assist and bring advantages to business incubators, technology centres, high-tech parks, and regional development agencies. It is expected that the management of these institutions will use the on-line sessions, individually designed courses and other didactic materials to cover the needs for training of their staff and/or tenants and start-up enterprises in technology sector.

Up till now the initial web site of the project where you can find more information about it is available in the address <http://www.evi-incubator.com>